

Message Text

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43

ACTION EA-07

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PA-04 /012 W
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R 011022Z FEB 74
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1317

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PERSONAL AND EYES ONLY FOR HUMMEL, EA, AND VEST, PA

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: OGEN, VS

SUBJECT: JAMES MARKHAM, NEW YORK TIMES

REFS: A) SAIGON 1359; B) STATE 020263

1. I HAVE NOTED JIM GREENFIELD'S APPROACH TO HUMMEL. UNLESS THIS MORNING'S TIMES CARRIES MARKHAM BLAST AND IF THE TWO OF YOU THINK IT USEFUL, PERHAPS HUMMEL MIGHT CALL GREENFIELD, GIVE HIM MY REGARDS, AND PASS ON PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM ME SAYING THAT MARKHAM'S CASE HAS BEEN COMPLICATED BY FACTS THAT (1) HE TOTALLY IGNORED REQUIREMENT FOR PRIOR APPROVAL WHICH IN HIS PERSONAL CASE WOULD HAVE BEEN AUTOMATICALLY FORTHCOMING, (2) THAT HE HAD THE BAD LUCK TO TAKE ALONG WITH HIM (AS INTERPRETER) CHARLES BENOIT, LOCAL FORD FOUNDATION REPRESENTATIVE WELL KNOWN TO THE GVN AS ONE OF THE MOST VIRULENT OPPONENTS OF GVN AND WHO, ONLY TWO WEEKS AGO, ACTED AS GUIDE FOR GROUP OF ANTI-GVN AMERICAN ACTIVISTS. PRESS CONFERENCE AT END OF THEIR TWO WEEKS STAY WAS SO OBVIOUSLY PROPAGANDA THAT NO OTHER BUREAU IN SAIGON WOULD TOUCH IT. THE FACT THAT THE TIMES DID OBVIOUSLY DID NOT ENCHANT THE GVN. THEREFORE, TAKING BENOIT ALONG WAS A PARTICULARLY UNLUCKY BREAK. (3) THE THIRD UNLUCKY BREAK WAS THE FACT THAT MARKHAM THREATENED BICH, DEPUTY TO NHA, THAT UNLESS HIS NOTES WERE RETURNED BY 4:00 P.M. TODAY (JANUARY 31) HE WOULD FILE STORY BLASTING GVN.

2. BICH, IN FACT, IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBASSY OFFICER, HAS CONTRASTED MARKHAM'S BEHAVIOR WITH ABC BUREAU CHIEF FRANK
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MARIANO WHO COURTEOUSLY HANDLED AN IDENTICAL SITUATION. MARIANO,

HE NOTED, RECEIVED ABC NOTES AND FILM THE VERY NEXT DAY AFTER GVN CONFISCATED THEM. BICH ASSURED US THAT MARKHAM'S NOTES WOULD BE RETURNED EVENTUALLY, BUT STATED GVN WOULD NOT RESPOND TO "THREATS" OF THIS KIND.

3. AT THIS POINT, ALL THE HARD EFFORTS I HAD BEEN EXERTING BEHIND THE SCENE, WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER, WITH THE PALACE, RAN INTO THE HARD BLOCK OF FLAT REFUSAL TO BE "BLACKMAILED" BY MARKHAM. THE GVN NOW FEEL THAT THIS WAS NOT A SIMPLE UNWISE VIOLATION OF A REGULATION, BUT THAT IT WAS DELIBERATELY PLANNED AS A SET-UP TO FIT IN WITH JANE FONDA'S ACTIVITIES, THE STOCKHOLM CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES - ALL DESIGNED TO REDUCE OR ELIMINATE CONGRESSIONAL ACTION ON AID. I HAVE TOLD THEM, AS CREDIBLE AS SUCH A THEORY MIGHT BE, I KNEW YOU AS FOREIGN EDITOR WOULD NEVER PLAY THAT KIND OF GAME. THEY ACCEPT THAT, BUT SAY THEY HAVE INFORMATION BENOIT HAS BRAGGED THAT THE GVN HAS FALLEN INTO "THEIR TRAP".

4. SO THERE YOU ARE. MARKHAM HAS NOT HANDLED THE MATTER WITH TOTAL BRILLIANCE. PERHAPS BENOIT IS USING MARKHAM. I JUST DON'T KNOW. IF YOU LET THINGS SIMMER FOR ANOTHER 24 HOURS OR LESS, WE CAN GET HIS NOTES BACK AND GET HIM BACK IN CIRCULATION QUIETLY. IF A CONFRONTATION IS BEING DELIBERATELY SET UP, I CAN'T HELP VERY MUCH.

MARTIN

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